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BLACK HISTORY MONTH & BLACK STUDIES

(This editorial by Alonzo Smith, Assistant Professor in the U.N.O. Black Studies Dept., appears in this issue of the FLAME, despite the fact that "Black History" month has passed, because it addresses issues which are as timely now as they were last month. We thank Brother Smith for permission to reprint his editorial.)

Black History Month has become a nationwide observance for Afro-Americans. From Boston to Los Angeles, parades, exhibits, speeches and cultural events offer a rich store of information. Elected officials from President Reagan to local city council members have proclaimed February as Black History Month.

So have we finally arrived? I think not. White politicians lose nothing by paying homage to Malcolm X. What few of them are willing to do is to implement his ideas into legislation. At least some of our scheduled events are superficial and inane. What good does it do for Black consciousness to have a Valentine's Day dinner? Dances are fine in their place, but we are supposed to be remembering our ancestors who were enslaved, segregated, beaten, raped, and otherwise humiliated. We are supposed to be remembering how they stood up in the face of this oppression and asserted their dignity as men and women, and that we are now enjoying the fruits of this courage.

If there is a tendency to lose sight of what is important in Black History Month, then the same is true for Black Studies. The price we pay for attainment of acade-

mic respectability is sometimes a loss of vision. Black Studies was born out of struggle, and it will require that to maintain it. Unlike most other academic fields of study, Black Studies has a basically adversarial relationship with the University. This is because its very existence is proof of a failure of the traditional academic system to accomplish its mission. Our white colleagues, sympathetic though some of them may be, are for the most part embarrassed because our existence really highlights the racism of the institution to which they owe their professional allegiance.

One of the things which arouses concern over Black Studies in the University is community reaction. I think that, as a group, we in the Black Studies Department seriously misjudged the community's view of and failed to foresee its reaction to the proposal to change Black Studies from department to program status. We gave up too much, too soon.

On the other hand, not all of the suggestions which came from the community were productive. At one meeting I attended, remarks were made about Blacks who are not from the USA. Any viable Black Studies curriculum needs to offer courses on the Caribbean and Africa, as well as the United States. The overthrowing of slavery by the Haitian people was an inspiration to Blacks everywhere. Each one of the current members of the Black Studies Department is a qualified professional, with something to offer students. Perhaps new people need to be brought in, but we should not throw away the Black faculty we already have.

I think that the current crisis in Black Studies at the University of Nebraska at

Omaha is the result of problems both among the Black faculty and in the Black community. But we should not just blame ourselves. We are living in an era when building Black unity is a difficult and arduous task. It is often hard to forge these bonds of unity when there are so many forces driving us apart.

As a people, we are very diverse. Some of us live in the heart of the community while others live on the edges. Some have a strong public commitment to Black liberation while others work in more quiet ways. Black History Month can help us remember how much we need to communicate with each other.

--Alonzo Smith

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The current Black Studies controversy is not a thing previously unknown to African people in Omaha. Practically since the very birth of the Black Studies Department, there has been an annual effort by U.N.O. to shut the Department down. At budget time, University officials, in the frothy spirit of the Dred Scott decision ("Black people have no rights which White people are bound to respect."), eye the Black Studies Department as an expendable target for the proverbial budget-cutting axe. Each time, such a move is met by some degree of protest. Up to now, the Black Studies Department has managed to elude any fatal swing.

This time around, however, the Black Studies faculty, instead of turning to the African community for support against the University's axe-swinging, decided to duck rather than fight back. They approved of a proposal, submitted by the chairman of the B.S.D., which would move Black Studies from a department to a program. The stated rationale for this proposal was that a Black Studies program, integrated into the whole of U.N.O. curricula, would be less vulnerable to yearly attack by University officials.

Among African people in Omaha, there are differences of opinion as to whether the Chairman's proposal, and the other members of the B.S.D. support of it, constitutes a practical vehicle for the survival of Black Studies or a selling-out.

Since the initial acceptance of the proposal by the Black Studies faculty, at least Brother Smith, and possibly other member(s) of the Department, has come to question both the wisdom and rightness of the proposal and of his agreement with it. And, judging from public response from the African community in Omaha, it would appear that most African people there who have an opinion on this question prefer that the Black Studies Department be fought for.

What will be the outcome? Who can predict. But the current conflict raises some vital questions, questions that have bearing on the relationship between the Black Studies Department and the African community in Omaha which it should serve. We will ask these questions here in the hope that the problems they uncover can be remedied.

- Why aren't each of the four members of the Black Studies Department speaking with one voice, in a voice which reflects the wishes of the African community?
- Why is so little being heard from African students at U.N.O.?
- Why aren't each of the four members of the Black Studies faculty involved more in the affairs of the African community? If they are not known, how, then, from where, shall they get support?
- By what twisted logic(?) have American-born Africans in Omaha too frequently treated the African and Caribbean-born African members of the Black Studies faculty as if they were foreigners, instead of as the Brothers and Sister which they are?

--Editor

SOCIOLOGIST JOINS IN CRITICISM OF LT. GOODMAN

In the latest edition of the Harambee Flame, there was an article entitled, "A Reaction to Lt. Goodman's Return." The essay, written by a black woman, dealt with Goodman's marriage to a white woman, and her feelings about black men and white women in general.

I wholeheartedly agree with her findings, her facts and her position that black men are one of the most gullible identifiable groups....

Sister V. raises additional points worthy of consideration. For instance, she writes: "Lt. Goodman returns from Syria and shames us with the appearance of his white wife. And the bit looks like Nancy Reagan." Regardless of what the woman looks like, Sister V. is correct about the shame. I believe that Rev. Jackson would have been doing the black community a favor by leaving that boot-licker stranded in Syria--at least he was around people of color! Not only is his wife white, but every single "neighbor" that he hugged was also a white female. He even had the gall to give one special attention in front of the entire U.S. media. I too felt the shame.

Sister V. then takes Goodman and pluralizes what he did by asking, "why must our men shame us so?" While many of our men do not marry white women, the question does apply to why we are so spineless in the face of racist attacks, why we ignore reality so that we can justify cowardice, or why we hide in corporations and merely jump on bandwagons instead of initiating some action that could bring about substantive change. In light of these realities, Sis. V.'s collective indictment is still appropriate....

While he (Lt. Goodman) was degrading us, another crime was being perpetuated--the myth of Sacred White Womanhood. And it is this myth that is the foundation of the standards of beauty which still exist in America today. Sure, white men committed overt acts of racism. But they were committed in her name, and she bene-

fitted by them because she was placed on a pedestal. And to this day, she is doing more than just voting for Reagan; she is marrying black millionaires, especially athletes....

The Sister's letter to the Flame is understandable. It is truly a travesty when a man like Lt. Goodman opts to spend all of his time and money living in a community where he is the only black person. His wife, his neighbors and his peers, it seems, are all white. And this is a reflection on Goodman; for he too is white as far as attitude and philosophy....

A black man married to a white woman can't lead me any place. All he can do is, by his example, give me another reason to write him off. His selection of spouse is a selection of direction, of purpose and of method. He will seek to apologize for whites because they represent his wife; he will seek to use the black experience to offset his fatal mistake; he will, in other words, only become involved with black experience as his way of purging his conscience (as if he had one, because the truth of the matter is that he couldn't be thinking about his children).

Black men blame black women for being "too domineering" or "too bossy." But a man who allows himself to be called "baby," who refers to his woman as "mama," who refers to his own house as a "crib" would be the same kind of man who would view any kind of rational thinking on a woman's part as being "domineering."

So until we take off the platform shoes, the "curls" and the skin-tight pants, we have a lot of nerve trying to rebuke concerns such as those made by the Sister regarding Goodman. We have a lot of work to do, and writing off "snow bunnies" would definitely be a step in the right direction.

--Matthew C. Stelly
(sociologist, Lincoln)

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NOTES ON THIS ISSUE

There are two items in this issue of the FLAME which give cause for some explanation about FLAME editorial policy. The first is the editor's remarks which follow the article by Brother Smith. Mention is made in those remarks about the "African community" in Omaha. It should be understood that the FLAME views African people as being just that - African people - wherever their/our places of birth. It is the policy of this publication to distinguish American-born Africans from those of, for example, African or Caribbean birth only when necessary in the context of a given article.

The other item in this edition of the FLAME which calls for explanation is the essay by Brother Stelly. The essay, as originally received, was several pages long. In order to run the entire piece, we would have had to run it in installments covering probably three issues of the FLAME. Passages were excerpted from the essay. If you are interested in obtaining a copy of the entire piece, contact the FLAME by mail. In this connection, those of you who wish to submit articles to the FLAME, try to keep your submissions to within three double-spaced pages. --the editor

- poetry -

EULOGY

young men who call themselves
think of themselves
as niggers
sit in crowded rooms with
young white men who
having nothing they know to live for
want to kill or die
with their boots on

young men who call themselves
think of themselves
as niggers
wag their hands like dogs' tails
eager to join up

young men who call themselves
think of themselves
as niggers
get uniforms and guns
and pats on their heads
by a white man
with stripes on his shoulders
and no features on his face

young men who call themselves
think of themselves
as niggers
are shipped off across the water
to heel to the wishes of
a white man they have never met
against people who look just like them

young men who call themselves
think of themselves
as niggers
are brought back in boxes
to a white man
who calls them
thinks of them
as niggers
awarded for a job well done.

(written for those misguided Brothers
of ours who volunteered to serve in
Uncle Sam's armed forces and subse-
quently participated in the invasion
and occupation of Grenada)

--David L. Rice

MY FRIEND & MYSELF

Bobbi said she needed me,
the cool kid
was just playing the "b"
snorting "c" and smoking "t"
said i get myself together

i lost thought and got caught.
slammed into an old old
friend of mine,
he's shaky in weight
and without a dime.
smells like a dirty rag for
a long long time
my friend and myself,
with no one to love
wiggling and giggling at
the moon up above.

--Laurence e. atwater

"...We as Black/Blue, joyous,
righteous and royal First World
people are artisans, creators,
and innovators. With moving and
growing Afrikan Spirits, we
should--no, we must perpetuate
ourselves, our families, our
communities, our nation, and our
planet. Through positive words,
acts, and deeds. Everyone, bro-
ther or sister, young or old,
should use his or her God/Allah-
inspired talents, in our case,
literary talents, to bring about
the glory and magnificence of
Black Life..."

--Byron W. Perry

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